

Amateur radio has had a long commitment and tradition to providing emergency communications. The tornadoes that hit the state of Oklahoma in May 1999, major earthquakes, hurricanes, the aftermath of the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, and the major blackout that affected the Northeastern U.S. last summer are examples of where Amateur radio stepped in to help provide emergency communications. In these days of cellular, satellite cellular and mobile Internet service, many people don't realize that their cellular and mobile Internet service is connected back to the same vast telecommunications network that handles their normal phone calls from home. This network can be disrupted by any natural or man-made disaster for sometimes hours, days or even in some places longer. Licensed Amateur radio operators from throughout the nation having the background, training, skills, and equipment step in to provide emergency communications. This has made the difference between communicating within and outside a disaster area, and not being able to communicate at all. Amateur radio is an important and integral part of the National Weather Service SKYWARN program as well as assisting with communications for disaster relief agencies such as the Salvation Army and Red Cross.

Sadly Amateur Radio is losing operators, many through death (Silent Keys), others through disinterest. With the attraction of the Internet it's getting harder to interest kids and adults in joining the Amateur Radio community. Much of the disinterest comes from the current licensing structure.

On a personal note for over the last twenty years due to dyslexia I have not been able to master Morse Code even as slow as 5 words per minute. I've tried every training method available short of hypnosis. I obtained my Technician (no-code) Amateur Radio license 5 1/2 years ago and have taken and passed the General and Extra written exams. Even with just a Technician license I have went on to serve my community as Emergency Coordinator, but would like to have access to HF so I could participate in statewide and nationwide emergency service nets plus be able to handle message traffic should the need arise.

Changing the current licensing structure would open up new avenues of communication for the disabled. Many of whom who would benefit with the help of adaptive software to access to the digital modes or just be able to talk to someone from across the country or around the world without having to log-on to the Internet.

I support the American Radio Relay League's proposal RM-10867 to restructure Amateur Radio licensing. It can only help to expand interest in Amateur Radio and thereby bring more people into the emergency communication aspect of Amateur Radio. Plus maybe it will help to answer the question many people ask me "Ham Radio do they still do that???"

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